

Inspiration Corner



Like many Ethiopian girls, Mamitu Gashe married too early at 15. Her private parts were torn when she tried to deliver her first baby. While in hospital recovering from her own fistula operation, she started helping the surgeons. She could not read or write but was so bright that they trained

her to operate. She has successfully repaired the fistulas of thousands of girls and is now a world famous expert! Recently she went back to school. She is now in P3! Amazing Mamitu.

Straight TALK

Keeping Adolescents Safe

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Wet Wet Wet...

Terrible floods have hit Uganda, especially the East. Water has cut off over 300,000 people, including pregnant girls who need to get to hospital. Let us hope that they have not developed fistula!

Rains caused the floods. But the destruction of wetlands and forests have made the floods worse. Trees and wetlands protect us from extreme weather. Let's care for our environment.



Right: the struggle to get to school.

With no money to get to hospital, this young girl will deliver at home. So dangerous!

WILL I EVER GIVE BIRTH? I AM SO TIRED!

Fistula... what is it?

Fistula is:

- A double sorrow
- A loss of dignity
- Holes between the vagina, bladder and rectum.

Fistula is a very serious injury. It happens when a female fails to deliver a baby after a long labour. Labour should not go beyond 18 hours.

Most females who get fistula are girls producing their first baby. The space between their pelvic bones is too small for the baby to get out. It gets stuck inside the girl.

No amount of pushing can get the baby out.

The baby usually dies. The girl's organs are torn and get holes in them.

Such damage can also happen during rape, especially when the girl is violently raped by more than one male. The penis actually pierces the wall of the vagina.

Fistula from childbirth is caused by pressure of the baby's head. The soft tissues of the vagina, the bladder and the rectum are pressed (squeezed) between the hard

skull of the baby and the hard pelvic bone.

After many hours, this pressure breaks down the soft tissues, and holes form.

The urine in the girl's bladder starts flowing out of the hole in the bladder and into the vagina. The faeces in the rectum also escape into the vagina. The girl starts to leak urine and faeces all the time. She cannot control them. She is always wet. She smells. Her clothes are stained. She cannot go in public.

Adolescent girls: most at risk

This is because they are not fully developed for childbearing. World Health Organisation says two million

females have fistula, most of them girls.

Fistula can be repaired but...

it is a delicate and difficult operation, and there are few trained surgeons. Most of the girls and women who are lucky enough to get operated will get better. But the best way to deal with fistula is to prevent it.

We can prevent fistula and stop the silent suffering by:

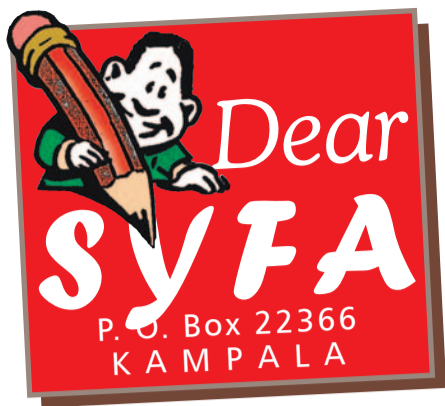
- Refusing early/forced marriage. Girls, you have better options!
- Delaying sex until you are 18-20. Girls, wait till your body is fully grown.
- Boys, respect girls and do not impregnate them.

Boys, have you impregnated a girl? Be a man. Make sure she gets check ups and delivers in a hospital where she can be operated if the baby cannot get out.



Faces of hope: girls at the famous Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa. After the operation, they stay in bed with a tube in their bladder for many weeks. This allows the walls of the bladder to heal.

Fistula is a hole or holes in the vagina, bladder and rectum. Girls, delay pregnancy and marriage. Your body is not yet ready.



Bengo LC 1 youth in Bugiri working in their garden: "We advise fellow youth to form clubs to fight poverty and famine."

Is it true that if you start sex early you can become infertile? Nawanya P, Busolwe Student's Center, Butaleja

YES, Nawanya! Early sex exposes you to STDs, which often lead to infertility. The bacteria can cause scars that block your fallopian tubes preventing your egg from meeting the sperm cell of the male in fertilisation. Also, early sex exposes you to HIV which you can pass to your baby. Doctors do have medicine that reduces the chance of mothers giving HIV to their babies. But it is not 100%: some babies still get infected. Mums with HIV should have few babies because reproducing strains their bodies, and they need to stay strong for the children they already have.

Multiple partners

Is it true that if you have sex with more than one girl you can get HIV though they are negative? Mulekeezi H, Kyakabadiima SS, Kibale

Your question is complicated. If all the girls are negative, then you cannot get HIV from them. But how do you know that they are negative? Having sex with many partners creates a mess in your life. Even if none of them has HIV, are you ready to deal with their fathers and brothers? With the fights and jealousy? Do not even contemplate having more than one girl! Herbert, get one who you can be serious about. Study her. Does she love you? Be faithful to her. Make protection a number one thing in your relationship.

One sexual encounter

Can having sex only once make a girl pregnant? Mukabalanga A, Buliisa SS, Mubende

YES! You do not need to have sex 100 times to get pregnant. If you are having sex without protection, the girl will certainly get pregnant. And once is enough.

I had sex with a girl. After a few days my urethra started paining. I am worried! TR, Kanungu

TR, a painful urethra is a sign that bacteria has entered the urinary tract and you have an infection. Rush for check up at a health center or hospital. We guess you did not use a condom. TR, think about why that was. And please, you need to inform that girl. She seems to have given you an STD, so she also needs to get treated. Watch out. Your fertility is at risk, as is hers. Do not let the STD destroy your ability to have babies.

Strength of the penis

Is it true that if you abstain from sex your penis becomes weak and impotent? Obewo J, 17, Kings of Kings ST Club, Iganga

NO, that is a wrong belief. The size and strength of your penis is not determined by sexual practice. So long as you can have erections, your penis is normal and will be able make a woman pregnant as well as give her sexual enjoyment. Obewo, congs to you if you are one of those abstaining! Now better be the king of the abstinence club in your school!

Masturbation

Is it true that when someone masturbates, he or she loses virginity? Muyingo M, S3, Kawempe Mixed SS, Kampala

NO, it is not true! Masturbation is where an individual manipulates his or her genitals to get sexual satisfaction. Virginity means you have never had penetrative sex. So Martin, if you have never had sexual intercourse, you are a VIRGIN.

Some religions and cultures oppose masturbation, but most doctors think it is a normal way for adolescents to manage sexual feelings. Just do not overdo it. Take it easy.

Family Planning

Can a girl who is using Family Planning (FP) get pregnant after having sex? Ahura E, S2, Kitara S.S, Hoima

YES and NO. It is YES, if the girl does not use the FP as the health worker advises. It is NO when the girl uses it correctly. FP methods such as pills and injections are extremely effective if you follow their schedule. If a girl takes her pill everyday at the same time, she is very very unlikely to get pregnant. The only problem with family planning is that when a girl is on injections or pills, the young couple relaxes on condom use because they no longer fear pregnancy. But pills and injections do not protect against HIV/STDs. So you need both: a hormonal FP method and

condoms. That is double protection.

HIV and withdrawal
Can a person get HIV even after withdrawal? Waaki W, Naboa SS, Mbale

YES, you can. Genital fluids of infected people are rich in HIV. If there is any exchange of sexual fluids between you and your partner, you can get or transmit HIV even if you withdraw before finishing. Use condoms correctly everytime.

Myth

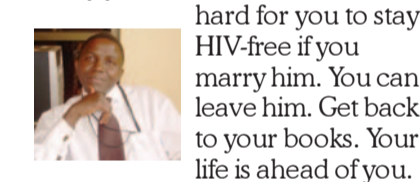
Is it true that eating too much cassava can increase vaginal fluids? Namande O, 17, Kiryandongo SS, Masindi

NO, it is not true! Normal vaginal discharge is caused by hormones. The quantity has nothing to do with what you eat. It depends on where the girl is in her menstrual cycle and on sexual excitement.

Rich guy with HIV

I tested for HIV with my boyfriend and he turned out positive. My mum is forcing me to love him because he is rich. N M, Buliisa SS, Mubende

Help your boyfriend to see a counselor about septrin and positive living. A big part of positive living is that he should NEVER infect you. Marriage is your decision, not your mum's. You do not say you love this man. It will be



hard for you to stay HIV-free if you marry him. You can leave him. Get back to your books. Your life is ahead of you. Do not mess it up. **Counselor: Jerolam Omach, Straight Talk**

ST Club Activity

What new thing have you learnt from this ST? How can you use this knowledge to make your life safer? Discuss this in your club and let everyone take part.



We give thanks to Straight Talk for giving educative and spiritual messages. Green Valley SS, Yumbe

Being spritual should not stop you from being glamorous. God wants you to be happy.

Samuel Carstine Kisakye a.k.a "Big Sam" is a Ugandan born-again Christian and gospel singer, living in South Africa. He says: appreciate who you are and be true to your values.

Dictionary: glamorous = having beauty and charm



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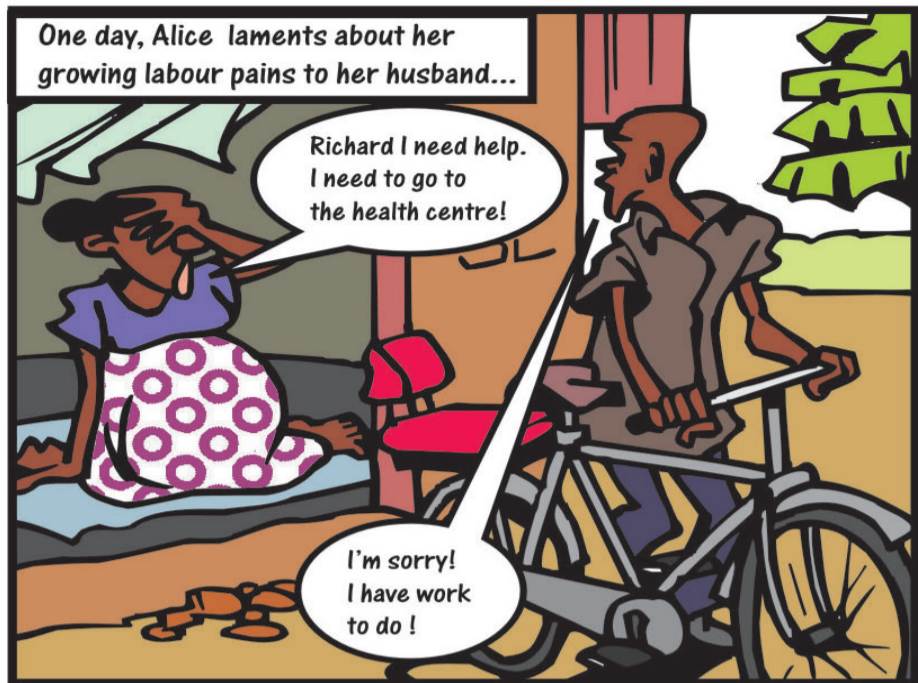
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What happened to my baby?



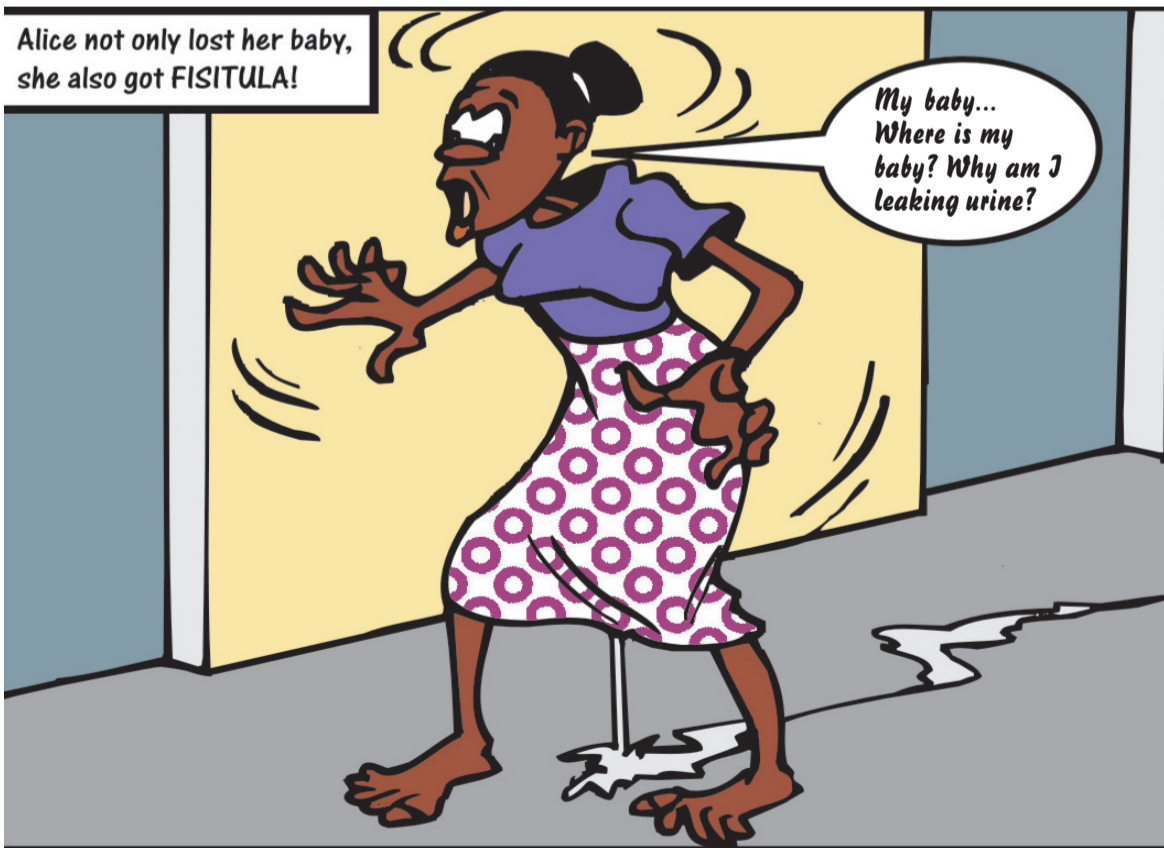
Every delivery is an emergency waiting to happen.



Many girls have narrow bones. They can only deliver by operation.



Delivering at home is not a sign of bravery. The baby can easily die. The girl can also die or be injured terribly. Fistula is never a curse.



Once your have had a hole in your vagina, even if surgeons have repaired it, you will not be able to push your future babies out through your vagina. It remains delicate. You will need an operation for each delivery.

Alice's story

Alice 16, left school in S2. (No school fees...) One day when she was walking home, a boda boda man offered her a lift. He took her to his house, locked her in and raped her.

Alice soon realised she was pregnant. Her parents demanded to know who was responsible. Alice's father and brother looked for the man and forced him to marry her.

Alice struggled with the pregnancy in the village. She worked so hard in the garden.

At 9 months, labour began and grew very painful. Her husband ignored her. Her in-laws told her: "You are a woman. Be strong. All of us went through it..."

Alice stayed at home in labour for three days. By the time they took her to hospital, her baby was dead and her body was damaged. They operated to remove the dead baby. Up to now Alice does not know what happened to her baby. She leaks urine wherever she goes.

How fistula occurs

Fistula happens when a girl stays in labour too long because her pelvis is too narrow for the baby to pass out of her body.

When labour starts, she gets contractions and pushes but the passage is narrow and cannot expand.

The soft tissues of the vagina, bladder and rectum are compressed between the baby's head and the mother's pelvic bone.

This pressure blocks the flow of blood to the tissues. So the tissues wear out and die. Holes are created in the wall of the vagina, the wall of the bladder and/or the wall of the rectum.

Think about trying to force a pawpaw out of a *kaveera* that is tied at the top. If you press the *kaveera* hard enough, it will start to break, tear and rip. That is what happens to the vagina and the surrounding organs when the baby cannot get out.

Home deliveries are risky

In an ideal world girls would not get pregnant. They would be in school. They would not get pregnant until they are

A young woman with fistula lies alone in her hut. Urine flows freely across the floor. She can be helped by an operation. If you know anyone with fistula, tell them not to lose hope. Hospitals in Uganda, including Kitovu, Kagando, Soroti and Mulago, can repair the holes in their vagina.



young women aged over 20.

In an ideal world every young woman would deliver in a well-equipped health centre. Her people would take her there as soon as the labour pains start.

Unfortunately the world is not perfect: in Uganda most girls and women deliver at home, and many get into problems.

Families need to know that if a girl pushes for more than two hours and the baby is not coming, she must be rushed to a health unit where they can operate on her.

Suffering

Females with fistula suffer greatly. Apart from the smell and stigma, they are terribly disturbed by the leaking urine. It keeps their buttocks, genitals and thighs constantly wet. It burns their skin which becomes sore and raw.

Fistula can be repaired, but only by a specially-trained doctor. Sometimes the doctor must do operation after operation as he or she tries to patch the different holes in the bladder, vagina and rectum.

The patient should not have sex for at least three months.

If there is a hole in the rectum, the doctor may have to make an opening in the abdominal wall so that the faeces come out into a bag. This gives the rectum a chance to rest and heal.

Prevention is best

Girls, do all you can to remain a virgin while you are still young. Resist early marriage. Think of something else you can do as you grow. If you do get pregnant, please deliver in a health centre. Make it safer for yourself.

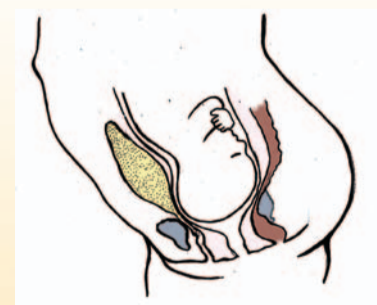


"The narrowness of the pelvic bones starts at birth due to malnutrition. Parents, protect the girl child from malnutrition and early marriage. Some fistulas are caused by rape by gangs, when many boys or men rape one girl. I call it malice."
Dr Isaac Achwal, Gynaecologist and Obstetrician, Engenderhealth

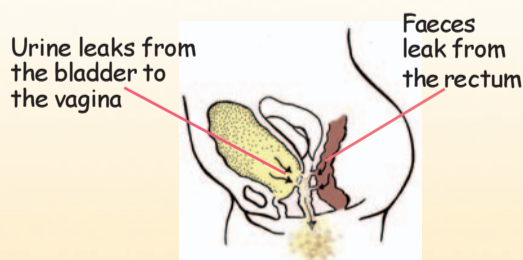
"As a midwife, I stay under tension while in charge of a girl in labour. I worry about her life and that of the baby. Many girls end up being operated. Often they are abandoned by their partners and have no close relatives. It is sad! Men, your presence gives relief to a girl and contributes to safe delivery."
Sister Doreen Ahebwa, Masindi Hospital



The biology and science of fistula

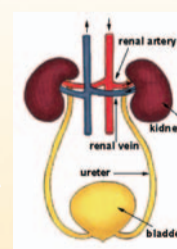


The baby's head presses down. The baby cannot get past the girl's pelvic bones (shown in dark grey). The baby's skull squeezes the bladder (shown in pale yellow) and the rectum (brown).



After the dead baby is removed: can you see the hole between the vagina and the bladder and the rectum? Urine and faeces now leave the body through the vagina.

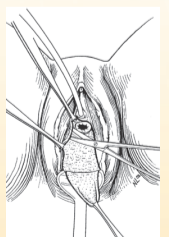
Your kidneys produce a tablespoon of urine every minute.



The bladder now has a hole in it. So instead of being a nice round balloon-like organ, it cannot hold the urine. The urine trickles into the vagina and out down the girl's legs every minute 24 hours a day.



Now only talented and brilliant surgeons and nurses can help the girl.



The operation is very delicate (imagine sewing a *kaveera*). The bladder cannot be allowed to expand for many weeks. The girl must have a tube in her bladder until the hole in the bladder has healed.

Family planning is a friend to sexually-active girls. Girls, if you decide to have sex use condoms everytime backed up by a daily family planning pill or a family planning injection every three months.